

# ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY

## — 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY —

### Final Pilotage Voyages to Dutch Harbor

*Pilotage* is an exercise in memory. All deck officers that sail with the Alaska Marine Highway System are required to obtain pilotage endorsements to their Merchant Marine licenses for the waters in which they operate. This includes the main shipping channels of Puget Sound, the waters of Southeastern Alaska, Prince William Sound, Kenai Peninsula and lower Cook Inlet, Kodiak Island area waters, the Alaska Peninsula, and the eastern Aleutians. Few have all of this, but all have some portion of it.

Patience is essential, first obtaining a required number of round trips over the waters that one is to be examined, with each trip documented and signed by the master of the vessel attesting that the pilotage applicant was in the wheelhouse observing the said waters. The U.S. Coast Guard must then officially approve the recorded pilotage trips before an applicant “sits” for a pilotage examination inside a glass-enclosed Coast Guard examination room.

To prepare for a pilotage examination, an applicant must study the charts of the area in detail and practice drawing them. Chart details include place names, a depth in fathoms or feet every square inch, safe courses and distances off points of land, all aids to navigation (lights and buoys) in their exact location, reefs, the ten fathom curve (contour), the drying-fathom curve, traffic separation schemes, cable areas, anchorage areas, and so forth. All must be committed to memory and reproduced on a blank piece of paper with only an outline of the coast. It is up to the applicant to fill in geographic details from memory.

Additionally, an applicant must write *verbatim* all aids to navigation as published in the *Light List* on the back of the chart. A chart and *Light List*



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recitation are drawn and written in the morning examination session. In the afternoon session, a pilotage applicant must write a detailed route and geographic description of the chart just drawn.

One must be able to draw and write all of this information accurately, that is, when a pilotage applicant can see the chart, *Light List*, and route descriptions with their eyes closed. When that happens, it is time to take the examination. After successfully passing the series pilotage examinations for a particular area, one receives from the Coast Guard a pilotage endorsement typed onto the front and backside of their Merchant Marine license. As an example for Southeastern Alaska, if it is a full endorsement, it will read, “First Class Pilotage on the waters of Southeastern Alaska from Dixon Entrance to Cape Spencer, including the port of Yakutat.”

There is also a feature known as *recency*. A deck officer who has a pilotage endorsement for a particular area, and perhaps does not travel that area frequently, must make trips over the lesser traveled waters every five years, more or less, to stay abreast of changes and maintain familiarity with the area. A five-year interval is not a hardbound rule however, realizing the logistics and difficulties of traveling in Alaska, but it is a guide.

During my career with the Alaska Marine Highway, I had drawn seventy-two pilotage charts from memory, including route descriptions and *Light List*, from Seattle, Washington to Dutch Harbor, Alaska. I did not have pilotage endorsements for upper Cook Inlet, nor was I around long enough to obtain the required number of pilotage trips for False Pass and Akutan, two ports that added to the Westward Run long after my time on the *Tustumena*.

I had begun taking pilotage examinations for the waters of the Alaska Peninsula, but did not complete the job. Later in my career, when I became a captain on the M/V *Kennicott*, I felt it would be prudent to complete the task if



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the *Kennicott* was required to sail to Dutch Harbor in the future.

In order to do this, I needed both recency for the pilotage I did have, and pilotage trips for the ports I was seeking to add to my pilotage endorsements. Coast Guard requirements allowed only two pilotage trips in each port per voyage. For example, upon arrival in Dutch Harbor, we could do two round trips into and out of the port, for purposes of pilotage, and no more. To complete the pilotage, I needed four round trips for Chignik, Cold Bay, and Dutch Harbor, in addition to the recency requirements for the pilotage I did have, namely Sand Point, Popof Strait, Iliasik Passage and King Cove. This process took two voyages on the Westward Run, completing a pilotage voyage in 2002 and returning for a final pilotage voyage in 2003. Regardless of my familiarity, it was like traveling on the Orient Express. What follows is a journal of those memorable voyages on the venerable *Tustumena*.

### First Voyage

**July 16, 2002** - I flew from Ketchikan to Homer arriving at 1530. My brother Tom picked me up at the Homer airport, but the *Tustumena* was not arriving in port until 1730 so we had the time for a good visit. Tom drove me around Homer; there are newer roads and more traffic than I remember. Homer has changed and it is busier.

Driving to the end of the Homer Spit, Tom showed me our middle brother Jim's equipment and cranes on the Spit. Then we went to Tom's *Jakolof Ferry Service* office on the boardwalk, and then to his boat, walking down to the marina behind the Salty Dawg. Going down the ramp and turning right, there sat on the bull rail a very recognizable man wearing a Greek fisherman's cap. It was former



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Governor Jay Hammond, the Father of the Alaska Permanent Fund sitting by Tom's new boat, the *Beowulf*.

Governor Hammond was waiting for a boat ride with Senator Clem Tillion to Halibut Cove. While the governor waited, he spoke to us. Visiting with this legendary man for nearly twenty minutes, we had this great Alaskan all to ourselves. What a pleasure and an honor! Governor Hammond was so friendly and warm, a wonderful conversationalist. Both Tom and I thanked him for being the Father of the Alaska Permanent Fund. I had the opportunity to tell him how our children's permanent fund dividend checks had been invested for use toward their college education. Then former President of the Alaska State Senate, Clem Tillion, arrived with his boat, the *Storm Bird*, and picked up Governor Hammond for their visit at Tillion's home across Kachemak Bay in Halibut Cove. *Storm Bird* just touched the dock and Governor Hammond jumped onboard. In the harbor, I viewed Clem's classic boat and former pilot vessel, the *Danny J*. Both of these vessels, *Storm Bird* and *Danny J*, had served as pilot boats when our father piloted ships from Homer to Anchorage.

Checking in with the *Tustumena* near 1800, my crew pass in hand, the Purser was waiting, placing me in the company stateroom and making dining arrangements in the officer's mess room. The crew treated me with open arm hospitality. It was wonderful and very nostalgic to be once again on the legendary *Tustumena*. My father's photo, among many others, is in the display in the Purser's Foyer. The captain of the *Tustumena*, John Paul "JP" Stormont, went to the airport to pick up his father for the Westward voyage. My luggage came on that later flight along with my camera, thus I was unable to get a photograph with Governor Hammond, much to my regret.

Captain Stormont brought my luggage to the ship, and when I arrived to my





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stateroom my suitcase was waiting inside. Captain Stormont's father is a delight. Stormy Stormont



Pilot observer, Captain Bill Hopkins with Stormy Stormont, WWII veteran of Merrill's Marauders.

is eighty-eight years old and a card-carrying member of Merrill's Marauders who fought the Japanese on the ground in Burma during World War II. Stormy had served as a Forward Observer. Mr. Stormont was a lively personality saying only of his service in World War II, "We went into the jungle and touched the enemy." At 2330, the *Tustumena* sailed for Kodiak.

**Wednesday, July 17, 2002** – Arriving the next morning in Kodiak, I visited our old friend, Jim

Ashford, the senior-most Marine Highway terminal agent. Upon departure, *Tustumena* voyaged west through Ouzinkie Narrows, Kizhuyak Bay, Whale Pass and Kupreanof Strait, passing through the Kodiak archipelago to Shelikof Strait. I brought a notebook with me and took notes on the piloting aspects as the *Kennicott* may use these waterways this winter in heavy southeasterly weather. I have not been to these places for thirteen years, so notes are in order.

The weather is clear and beautiful. When we left Kodiak, three more pilot observers joined the ship: Davy Lund of Western Pioneer, Clay Cristy from



Entering the Near Island Channel as the *Tustumena* approaches the dock in Kodiak. Bos'n Joe Amon on the bow.



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Homer, and Carter Whalen, a former Marine Highway mate. Normally, only two pilot observers are allowed onboard. Four are unusual. We laid low in the corners of the wheelhouse so as not to interfere with the bridge team. The three other observers were gaining pilotage trips in order to join the Alaska Maritime Pilot's Association in Dutch Harbor. Captain Stormont was very kind and tolerant, as were his officers.

To mingle with the passengers on this trip was interesting while listening to the comments and reactions. The country is beautiful and inspiring when seen in the sunshine. Many of the passengers were locals, Natives, fishermen, and a mix of hardy, independent tourists. After passing through Kupreanof Strait, we entered into Shelikof Strait with a beautiful sunset to the west outlining the mountainous Alaska Peninsula.

**Thursday, July 18, 2002** - Early next morning we were doing a close pass by Kak Island in search of sea lions. There were none, but we viewed cliffs of columnar basalt. Approaching Nakchamik Island, we continued west toward Anchorage Bay and the port of Chignik. Once all fast at the Aleutian Dragon cannery dock many people came down to the dock to see the ship. Some were dressed up in their



Passing close by Kak Island near Chignik

finest clothes and came onboard to have lunch in the dining room, sitting with their friends and family engaged in easy conversation, with napkins unfolded on their laps, to be served by a real waiter. Most did not travel with us, but only wanted to have the big, floating restaurant come to their front door.



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There were lots of seining vessels tied on the inside of the dock, bouncing around like hobbyhorses



A view of the village of Chignik, Anchorage Bay, Alaska Peninsula

in the chop. The fishermen are not fishing as the price is too low due to the glut of salmon on the market. They cannot yet compete with farmed salmon. *Tustumena* went to work unloading and loading passengers and vehicles.

An hour after departing Chignik, Captain Stormont passed within one half mile under the gaze of magnificent Castle Cape. It is one of the more

spectacular capes in Alaska, with stratified layers of rock rising 1,200 feet above the sea, topped with turrets of rock like a castle. What a thrill to see it up close on a sunny day. Later, at Cape Ikti (Seal Cape), we viewed a pod of giant fin whales.

These are the second largest whales to the blue whale. Fin Whales appear like big rubber fuel bladders, their spouts shooting up much higher than those of the smaller humpback whale.

We next arrived in Sand Point in the Shamagin Islands in the early evening. All the kids in town came down and ran around the ship. In Sand Point, the *Tustumena* becomes the Fun House of the North for the kids. Later that night, we transited through Illiasik Passage in moonlit darkness. This wide inside passage between the Pavlof Islands and the Alaska Peninsula is



Magnificent Castle Cape near Chignik





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spectacular in the daylight with areas of columnar basalt bluffs. We could not see the spectacular Pavlof Volcano or its close neighbor, the Pavlof Sister.

**Friday, July 19, 2002** - Early the next morning, *Tustumena* had a quick whistle stop at King Cove, then onto Cold Bay. At Cold Bay, the Frosty Volcano was visible, and to the northwest in the Bering Sea the top of Amak Island was visible over the low, grass-covered isthmus of the Izembek Lagoon National Monument. After departure from Cold Bay, we proceeded on to False Pass.

This was my first time in False Pass, transiting through Isanotski Strait, separating Unimak Island, the first island of the Aleutian Islands, from the western tip of the Alaska Peninsula. Isanotski Strait turns into the shallow False Pass on the north end as it exits into the Bering Sea. We met an outbound vessel called the *Victor* passing her port to port. She was a wooden power scow, green hull and white superstructure, hauling salmon to canneries. Two days later, her engine room exploded and all five crewmembers had to swim for it in survival suits. The *Victor* burned and sank off Cape Kuliak, Alaska Peninsula, in Shelikof Strait. One crewmember was burned badly.

Most of the salmon destined for the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers pass through Isanotski Strait and

False Pass. The False Pass fishermen have taken so many fish in past years, diminishing the runs for the big rivers. This year, the State of Alaska, all but shut down the False Pass fishery. The salmon are now returning in numbers to the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. The village of False Pass is on



Passing the tender vessel *Victor* in Isanotski Strait on her last voyage





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the Unimak side and is in economic trouble because of the shut down. Here, brown bears walk through town like they own the place. At the dock, Aleut children were selling Japanese glass balls collected off the beaches and smoked salmon. In April, the women sell grass baskets for a reasonable price. After April, all production goes to Anchorage for the tourist market. The men were waiting for a fishery opening. From False Pass, we sailed for Dutch Harbor, passing through the Unimak Bight and crossing Unimak Pass into the Bering Sea.

**Saturday, July 20, 2002** - Arriving at Dutch Harbor/Iliuliuk Bay (Ill-yool-yook) the next morning in fog and drizzle, we did two round turns for pilotage before going to the Ballyhoo Dock. The harbor was



The *Tustumena*'s bow comes close to the stern of the freighter *Frio Hamburg* at Dutch Harbor

busy with ships of every stripe. Russians and Japanese were at anchor in the uneasy Summer Bay anchorage, waiting to clear Customs and Coast Guard inspections, their bows rising and plunging in the ocean swell. We hardly had space to tie up at the Ballyhoo Dock. Once alongside and in position, the bow of the *Tustumena* was several feet from the stern of the Cypriot-flagged vessel, *Frio Hamburg*. The captain of the “Cold

Hamburger” watches the Tusty dock warily. Captain Stormont and the Cypriot captain tipped their hats toward one another. Dutch Harbor is a hive of maritime activity and going ashore I walked up the road to take some photos, but the fog and drizzle were heavy, and the views obscured.

*Tustumena* remained in Dutch for about six hours. On departure, the fog and



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drizzle continued unabated, but we could see the great landmark of Priest Rock, eight miles outside of Dutch in the Bering Sea, as we passed by on ocean swell. This tall rock has the aspect of a black-robed priest with his hand in apposition of prayer. It is said locally that if Priest Rock is seen on the way out to the Bering Sea that a vessel will have a safe voyage. If Priest Rock is not seen, then the vessel should return to Dutch Harbor. Fortunately, we could see Priest Rock. After Priest Rock, we crossed the northern entrances to Unalga Pass and Akutan Pass. Thousands upon thousands of sooty shearwaters covered the water, scooting along to get out of our way, their bellies full of food, wings flapping like high-speed oars. Scattered among them were horned puffins, and here also were numerous humpbacked whales spouting among the birds.

Arriving in the village of Akutan, I and the other pilot observers went ashore and visited the Russian Orthodox Church. It is a very beautiful structure, surrounded by a cemetery. Most were Aleut people, and we met a man on a four-wheeler vehicle, "*Lawrence of Akutan*," who gave us a brief tour of the village. The main street is a boardwalk and the folks drive four-wheelers or push wheeled carts on the boardwalk. There is a posted speed limit of fifteen miles per hour. Upon departure, we completed two round turns in Akutan Bay to record two trips for pilotage as allowed by the Coast Guard.

**Sunday, July 21, 2002** - At Cold Bay, the wind was blowing hard and the docking was difficult.

Captain Stormont did a great job of easing the ship alongside, his father Stormy observing his son work. Cold Bay is the second largest "wind draw" on the western side of the Gulf of Alaska. The Barren Islands – Kamishak Bay area is the largest, while the mouth of the Copper River is the third largest wind draw.

All the way back to Kodiak, we suffered low visibility and general murk, but



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this is how the Aleutians and Alaska Peninsula can be sometimes. There was little to see, except by



For a brief moment, the fog lifted and we could see Inner Iliasik Island in Iliasik Passage.

radar. A brief opening occurred in Iliasik Passage, between King Cove and Sand Point, but fog and drizzle rapidly closed in again for the duration of the voyage to Kodiak.

**Tuesday, July 23, 2002** - Reduced visibility never really lifted until we were in the Barren Islands, south of Homer and Seldovia. Completing the recency requirements for the pilotage I did have, I

was now halfway through obtaining the required pilotage trips I needed to qualify for the remaining pilotage examinations for Chignik, Cold Bay, and Dutch Harbor. Completing two more round trips for those ports would have to wait until the following year. We arrived safely back in Homer.

## Second Voyage

**Tuesday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003** – I set out at 0645 from Ketchikan, Juneau, Anchorage and lastly, Homer



*Tustumena* Chief Steward, Steve Rockwood at the gangway in Kodiak.

at 1540. Once again, my brother Tom met me at the Homer airport. Tom had to make a Jakolof Ferry run to Yukon Island, and dropped me off at the AMHS Ferry Terminal on the end of the Homer Spit. *Tustumena* was at the dock, crew greeting me warmly at the gangway.



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The weather was low overcast, with drizzle, and fog. The wind is calm. With a crew pass in hand, Captain John Paul Stormont is very kind and accommodating. I made myself comfortable in stateroom 219, starboard side, aft. Only two veteran crewmembers are onboard who worked when I sailed on the *Tustumena*. They are the Bos'n, Joe Amon, and the Chief Steward, Steve Rockwood.

**Wednesday, June 11, 2003** - We departed Homer at 2130 bound for Kodiak arriving there at 0700. With some time in port, I discovered where master dory builder, Ed Opheim, lives at the Senior Citizen's Home, just behind the Russian Orthodox Church on Erskine Avenue. I walked up and visited with him for two hours. Ed still has a full head of hair, and a sharp and keen memory, in this, his 93<sup>rd</sup> year in Alaska. We sat in his small living room, surrounded by his family and boat photos. Ed began telling me he has written fifty short stories, but nobody wants to read them because people do not read these days. I encouraged him to keep writing as his stories are one of a kind.

Delving into his early childhood, Ed was born in Sand Point, and raised in Left Hand Bay, of Balboa Bay, near the Kagayan Flats, opposite from the Unga Spit, on the Alaska Peninsula. His mother and father lived in a "barabara with a driftwood extension." It was on the main caribou trail from the north to south on the Peninsula and Ed remembered caribou walking on the roof of their barabara (a subterranean dwelling). His mother was born in a barabara in the main village on the south side of Korovin Island, north of neighboring Popof Island, where Sand Point is located.

Raising cattle on their homestead, the Opheim family made dairy products for sale in Sand Point, riding back and forth on a homemade boat called the *Hilda O*. Telling me of his earliest recollection, Ed was on a trip to Seattle on the steamer *Mariposa* while passing through Seymour Narrows. Ed's mother was writing on the table with her finger. The table was dusty with ash from





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the explosion of the Mt. Katmai volcano in 1912. Ed recalled riding other vessels, including the famed mail boat, *Dora*, and nearly capsizing in Shelikof Strait in a small sailing dory.

Writing with a nice electric typewriter hooked up to a printer, Ed commented, “The printer would do more if it were hooked up to one of those big machines (computer). I don’t know anything about those big machines, but I can build good boats and salt cod.” Ed’s parting words were, “Don’t hit any rocks!” With advice well taken, I shook his firm hand and thanked him for his time.

We departed Kodiak at 1700 bound for Chignik. Remaining in the wheelhouse to observe our passage through Ouzinkie Narrows and Whale Pass, we rode a big flood current through Whale Pass passing on the north side of Ikognak Rock among whirlpools and tide rips. At Cape Raspberry, the low overcast and drizzle lifted, turning into light rain. The vessel was rolling easy with her new stabilizer fins deployed in Shelikof Strait.

**Thursday, June 12, 2003** - Arriving at Chignik at 1115, the weather improved to fair with high cirrus overcast, sunshine and warm. Going ashore with a camera and crossing the bridge and creek behind the cannery, one finds that Chignik is a beautiful place, surrounded by high mountains, and occupied with friendly people. After returning to the *Tustumena*, I had lunch with Captain Stormont and Mrs. Janice Reeve Ogle of Cold Bay. She is the daughter of the famed bush pilot, Bob Reeve, the founder of Reeve Aleutian Airways. Janice spoke highly of her father and I had the pleasure of telling her that I met him twice as a young man in 1972 and 1973. Mr. Reeve took the time to sign his book for me, always encouraging young people to work hard, stay in school and be successful.

Upon our departure from Chignik at 1300, we passed 0.5 nautical mile off Castle Cape for spectacular views of the magnificent cape. There is none



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more beautiful. While underway, the sunshine continued, and farther along our route, we could see the base of the massive Veniaminof Volcano behind Mitrofanina Island. *Tustumena* crew conducted their weekly Fire and Boat Drills, and then the gyrocompass broke down. Helmsmen are steering by magnetic compass until Dutch Harbor where a repair is possible. Entering among the Shumagin Islands at Karpa Island and the north side of Korovin Island, we arrived at Sand Point. A large crowd on the dock and a long line of waiting vehicles greeted the *Tustumena*.



Castle Cape on a sunny day, Alaska Peninsula

**Friday, June 13, 2003** - A full moon and Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, everyone is looking over their shoulders. The *Tustumena* departed Sand Point at 0030. At 0230, I woke up and looked out my stateroom window to see the moonlit silhouette of the Pavlof Volcano and the Pavlof Sister. It is too dark for a photo but hauntingly beautiful to observe. A very strong northwest wind is blowing out of Pavlof Bay. I hear wind howling over the decks and through the whip antennas. Upon arrival at King Cove at 0700, the wind is roaring out of King Cove Lagoon and down the mountains at northwesterly 45 knots with much higher gusts. Captain Stormont docks the *Tustumena*; it is a difficult landing. Upon our departure at 1030, we sight a large rainbow at Vodapoini Point (the watering place), on our way to Cold Bay.

Strangely, the wind diminishes as we get closer the Cold Bay. Usually, it is the other way around. The wind at the Cold Bay dock is mere 15 knots from the north. This is the second largest wind draw on the Gulf of Alaska, second



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only to Area 3A, the Barren Islands. We departed Cold Bay for False Pass at 1200.

Several hours later, we passed through Isanotski Strait at maximum flood. There were many



Strong currents in Isanotski Strait as the *Tustumena* approaches False Pass.

whirlpools and difficult steering for the helmsman to maintain a course. At the False Pass dock, kids bring down milk baskets full of Japanese glass fishing net balls and marine fossils, fossilized snail and clamshells. Japanese glass balls sell for \$5.00 apiece if netted, and \$3.00 without netting. They are an enterprising group.

Two German passengers disembark here to climb the beautifully conical Mount Shishaldin, the highest volcano in the Aleutians, rising over 9000 feet in elevation. The weather is mostly overcast with some sun breaks, but much cooler and northerly winds increase to 20 knots. Behind the village of False Pass rises the rugged volcano of Round Top, locally called *Ragged Jack*, due to its rough and glacially eroded surface. We depart False Pass at 1615 and I record another False Pass pilotage trip. There are six more complete before I could apply for pilotage here. I may not get this one before I retire.

As we rounded Cape Pankof and set our course west, I was able to see the wreck of the Alaska Steamship, *S/S Oduna*, on the beach high and dry. Running aground in a snowstorm, the *Oduna* is a rusty landmark when visible. Passing along the Unimak Bight, we can see the bases of the Isanotski Volcano, the Shishaldin Volcano, and the Westdahl and Porgromni Volcanoes, their tops enshrouded in clouds.



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**Saturday, June 14, 2003** - Crossing Unimak Pass, we stay south of the Krenitzen Islands due to the northerly winds. We transit through Avataanak Strait and Akutan Pass, a route pioneered by Captain Stormont. Our captain spent much time here as crab fisherman and knows the area very well. We arrived off Dutch Harbor at 0530. Captain Stormont does two round turns between Ulatka Head and the APL (American President Line) dock so I can get my final two trips for pilotage. We tie up at the Sea-Land dock (Ballyhoo Dock) at 0615.

We are supposed to leave at 1200, but our gyro part, a DC converter, is arriving with an Alaska Airlines flight at 1200. In the meantime, I go for a ride around Dutch Harbor and Unalaska with Captain Stormont in the *Tustumena's* pickup truck. Captain Stormont lived here for six years. Driving all the back roads, we crossed the bridge to Unalaska and Town Creek, and to Captain's Bay. It is a beautiful place and a very active port.

There is much new construction and the town is looking more modern than ever before. A lot of the trash and old junk has been cleaned up.

Gone are most of the Quonset huts and battered World War II buildings, and mountains of scrap iron.

We depart Dutch Harbor only two hours late having made successful repairs to the gyro- compass. With

this departure, I complete my pilotage trips for Dutch Harbor/Iliuliuk Bay and thank Captain Stormont.

Remaining on the bridge to Priest Rock, the sky on the Bering Sea side is low overcast, fog and drizzle, but Priest Rock is still visible. We stay north in the



A view of Town Creek at Unalaska, Alaska





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Passing Priest Rock and Cape Kalekta as the *Tustumena* leaves Dutch Harbor.

Bering Sea on our way to Akutan village. The wind is moderate west-northwest at 35 knots, seas 8 feet, and very low overcast. Some wind bursts pick up spray off the water, almost like watching twirling williwaws. There was much sea bird feeding activity in Akutan Pass.

At North Head, Akutan Island, the low overcast lifts and the sun returns. There on a high cliff

between North Head and Hot Springs Bay, is a boiling, steaming hot spring, with steam blowing up and down the face of a cliff in the wind. I have never seen it before. Akutan Island is beautiful and as Lewis and Clark would have said, “we enjoyed many scenes of visual enchantment.” The sun came out fully at the village of Akutan for our 1730 arrival.

Captain Stormont and I step ashore for a walk on the boardwalk taking some good photos of the Russian Orthodox Church. There are women having a bake sale on the dock and our passengers are lining up to buy real Akutan pies. While on the boardwalk, *Lawrence of Akutan* came by with his six-wheeler and gave us a riding tour of Akutan.

Lawrence was the City Engineer responsible for the water system, the sewer system, the electrical system, boardwalk maintenance, and was the town's



A view of Akutan Island on a blustery day.



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longshoreman. A great fellow, Lawrence is a happy man, telling us he was born in “East Akutan.” After the tour, Lawrence returned us to the foot of the gangway just in time for departure. We departed at 1752 for Cold Bay, Akutan being a whistle-stop as we are trying to catch up to the schedule. I collected another trip for Akutan and we passed north into the Bering Sea and returned to the cover low overcast, drizzle, and fog.

**Sunday, June 15, 2003** – It is a clear sky and a full and orange moon while crossing the Unimak Bight. The crew reported seeing the Shishaldin Volcano smoking in the moonlight. We arrived quietly with fog and drizzle enshrouding Cold Bay. However, at



A view of the village of Akutan, Alaska

0800, we arrived at short time later to a sunny King Cove with calm winds. The air was pure and sharp, the mountains beautiful to see on Deer Island and behind King Cove. We departed King Cove at 0915 with steam rising from the Peter Pan cannery.



Ragged Jack (Round Top Volcano), False Pass, Alaska

Looking ahead to Iliasik Passage at Bold Cape, we can see it is obscured in fog. I stayed up for Iliasik Passage and low overcast and fog were blocking all views. I had hoped for a view of the Pavlof Volcano and the Pavlof Sister during the daylight hours. These are very difficult volcanoes to



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see, as so often happens, fog and obscured visibility are the normal weather pattern here. The



The fog lifted and we had an unobstructed view of the Pavlof Volcano and its smaller twin, the Pavlof Sister.

Chief Mate, Bob Ruger, told me that he last viewed Pavlof Volcano in 1996.

Miraculously, at 1200, the fog parted and revealed the spectacular sight of the Pavlof Volcano and the Pavlof Sister, a near symmetrically perfect snow covered volcanic cone. The passengers come out in droves to photograph these mountains. The sun is warm and the sea is

glassy, almost oily smooth on this “Inside Passage” off the great Alaska Peninsula. We pass north of the Pavlof Islands and by 1330, we enter among the Shumagin Islands of Unga, Popof, Korovin, and Andronica. We arrived at Sand Point 1545 in the glorious sunshine.

Captain Stormont again put the *Tustumena*’s pickup truck ashore. Driving to the airport, around town, and to a viewpoint high above the harbor, we could see the Pavlof Volcanoes to the southwest, the sand dunes of Unga Island, across Korovin Strait to the Alaska Peninsula, and to the south down Popof Strait to the unimpeded Pacific Ocean. It was stunningly beautiful.

To the northeast, our route to Chignik is hidden in dense fog. Our Captain once stayed in Sand Point for three weeks. Knowing a little about the town, he introduced me to his old friend, Ernie Shaistikof of Unalaska. Sand Point is a nice town with a few planted spruce trees in the yards. Our departure is delayed to replace a fuel injector on a main engine. Once repairs are completed, the *Tustumena* is underway at 1630. We entered dense fog in Korovin Strait near Pirate





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Cove, and it continues all the way to Castle Cape, the fog whistle sounding one blast every two minutes for hours on end.

**Monday, June 16<sup>th</sup>**, - We arrived at Chignik at 0100 and departed at 0145, only forty-five minutes late from the published schedule. The fog dissipates revealing a high overcast sky. Captain Stormont puts the throttles down and the *Tustumena* runs for Kodiak at full speed. Crew change day is coming and they do not want to be late, and time is needed for fueling in Kodiak.

I walked to the bridge crossing the creek behind the cannery, but return to the ship shortly thereafter and worked out a distance chart from Chignik to Kodiak via Cape Sitkinak and up the east side of Kodiak Island. The weather was high overcast with light southerly airs and slight seas for our crossing of Shelikof Strait from the Alaska Peninsula side to the Kodiak Island side at Cape Ikolik.

At 1305, we were abeam of Cape Karluk, her top shrouded in a cap of fog like a lenticular cloud. At Cape Uganik we begin to see the farthest outpost of naturally occurring spruce trees struggling to survive. Slowly advancing west, the tree line is calculated to advance at a rate of one mile per century against the prevailing southwesterly flowing winds. The sun was out and Kodiak Island was showing deep green and lush verdure.



Koniuji Island in Whale Passage, Kodiak Island in the background.

Riding a strong ebb current through Whale Pass, the *Tustumena* traveled twenty knots over the bottom. We sighted several humpbacked whales in Kupreanof Strait leading into Whale Pass. Captain Stormont invited a young





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man and his family to the wheelhouse for Whale Pass, and served them brownies he bought at the Akutan dock bake sale. This young man is the one who won the “Name the Ferry” contest for the first high speed ferry, the *Fairweather*. This young man and his family won a free trip anywhere the Marine Highway travels. They chose wisely and were not disappointed in choosing to travel to Dutch Harbor, perhaps the Alaska Marine Highway’s most exotic route. Arriving at Kodiak at 1915, we were fifteen minutes early per published schedule. Captain Stormont is quite happy with his speed calculations and the performance of the *Tustumena*. The engineers begin to take on fuel.

While loading for Homer, I went inside the terminal to thank Jim Ashford for helping me with my travel arrangements. Just then, former Alaska State Senator, Clem Tillion, walked in, and pointed at me and said, “You are Jack’s son!” He and my father had been long-ago friends. We ended up talking for some time. Clem is now 78 and still traveling about on fisheries business. Possessing a wonderful memory and a deep knowledge of Alaska, especially fisheries issues, we conversed about many things.

Clem spoke of people from old Seldovia. There was, for example, Frank Raby, the champion razor clam digger of Cook Inlet, Adam Block, Susan English’s father, who came to Seldovia in 1905 and was a young Marine at the flag raising ceremony in Sitka when Russia transferred Alaska to the United States, Jack English the Territorial Magistrate, and Admiral Squeaky Anderson, the first foreign-born U.S. Navy



Pilot observer, Captain Bill Hopkins with former Alaska State Senate President, Senator Clem Tillion of Halibut Cove on the dock at Kodiak.



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Admiral. Clem noted that Ted Pedersen's father, Captain C. Theodore Pedersen, was the first white man to walk across the Brooks Range. C.T. Pedersen was icebound on the arctic coast and walked to Fairbanks with an Eskimo guide. Ted was himself the first man to record walking around the full circumference of Unimak Island to see the new schoolteacher at False Pass.

Clem said that when he purchased Ismailof Island at Halibut Cove, he had a "Letter of Credit" from Squeaky Anderson to Elmer Rasmussen, the future founder of the National Bank of Alaska. The letter said, "Dear Elmer, this kid is a little crazy, but he catches lots of fish." Elmer loaned Clem the money to buy the island.

Clem was at the Battle of Guadalcanal and questioned why he lived and several of his friends did not. In 1947, he walked from Anchorage to Homer to stake out a homestead. Ending his search for a homestead at Halibut Cove, the rest is history. Senator Tillion was the president of the Alaska State Senate when the Permanent Fund was created during the Hammond Administration. In order to pass the bill on final passage, he needed to have twenty senators present for a quorum and vote. Only eighteen showed up. Senator Tillion had the Alaska State Troopers find and arrest the two missing senators, forcing them to the Senate chamber in Juneau for the final vote in handcuffs! Clem says, *"In politics, as on a ship, when you have the conn, you make the ship go where you want it to go."*

**Tuesday, June 17, 2003** - We arrived in Homer on schedule at 0800.

Arriving to the wheelhouse at Point Pogibshi, I watched Seldovia go by on the starboard side. Clem Tillion arrived to the wheelhouse first having already poured some coffee. I mentioned that I could still see Ushagat Island of the Barren Islands in the distance astern of us. Clem recalled that he has been

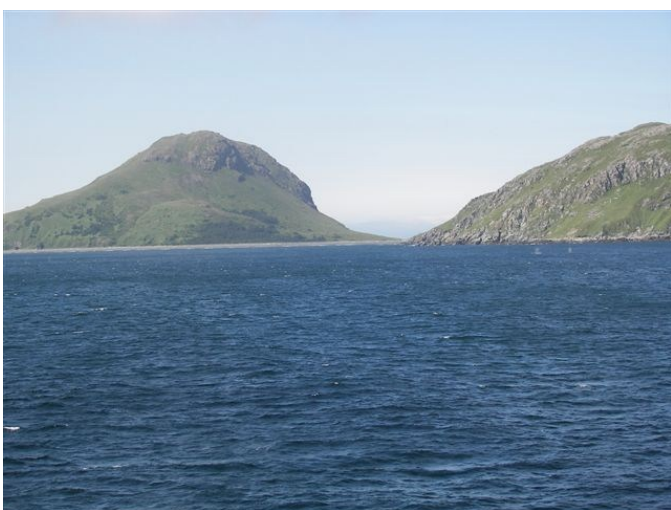


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on all of the Barren Islands hunting seals and sea lions for bounty in the latter 1940's, including a camp on St. Augustine Island (volcano), when such practices were legal. "We did what we had to do in order to make a living," said Clem.

I have always been curious about the stunted trees on Ushagat Island. From sea they appear as wind-blown hedges, bonsai trees clinging the valley floor and lower flanks of the mountains. I asked



A view of Ushagat Island of the Barren Islands showing some of the stunted spruce trees that are found only on this island.

Clem about Ushagat's trees; how big are they?

"Under the trees, it is like a park," he replied.

"They are Sitka Spruce and only about forty feet tall, but thick. The branches interlock, like a thatched roof, and once under the canopy, one is well protected from the wind and rain." As the trees spread up the mountain flanks, they become smaller until at timberline they are only three feet high.

Senator Tillion is the first man I have spoken with who has set foot on the Barrens and knows something about their flora and fauna. In the summer, the islands are covered with beautiful wild flowers and there are some small salmon runs on some of the larger streams. Foxes and voles occupy Ushagat, and marmots live on Sud Island. The foxes arrived with fox farmers in the 1930's. The fox farm shack still stands in the "woods." Inside the fox farmer's shack, the bookshelf still had magazines from the 1930's, as the roof did not leak. Clem noted that the voles were thought to have arrived to Ushagat Island on a piece of driftwood, and so too the marmots on Sud



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Island.

Describing the difficulties of landing a boat on the Barren Islands due to rocky shores and high surf, Clem offered how to anchor up in a strong williwaw.

“If you anchor in shallow water, your anchor chain comes up tight as the williwaw hits. You can pull your windlass from its foundation, part the chain, or drag anchor. The trick is to anchor in deep water with lots of scope in the anchor chain. When the williwaw hits your boat, it passes before the anchor chain can come tight.” I thought that was an interesting point of seamanship.



A view of rugged Sugarloaf Island of the Barrens providing the largest sea lion haul out in the Gulf of Alaska.

After docking at Homer, we all said our farewells, and I disembarked. It was a great voyage, interesting people to meet, very nice *Tustumena* crew, and a good ship. It is never boring on the *Legendary Tustumena*! It was now time to return to work and home in Ketchikan, and begin pilotage studies in earnest and schedule a series of pilotage examinations with the Coast Guard.

Written and Photographs Provided by Captain Bill Hopkins, AMHS Retired

